

DOUGLAS EAST

GERALDINE

O'NEILL



**House of Keys General Election
Thursday 29th September 2011**

Secure the Future

Dear voters

My name is Geraldine O'Neill I am standing for election in Douglas East. I have chosen to stand in Douglas East because I am originally from here and I still have family connections in the area. I live and work in Douglas. As a teacher in Douglas I have many past and present pupils and their families living in the constituency, therefore I am aware of the needs, aspirations and concerns of the community in Douglas East.

I believe I possess the personal skills to be effective and successful in Government. From my professional background, as a teacher, I work as part of a team to motivate, analyse and assess information. I have successful business experience as a Recruitment Consultant, I am a linguist and I have been involved in International Trade Negotiations. Throughout my varied career I have successfully networked with many different organisations. I am a problem solver and although we face difficult economic challenges over the next five years, if elected I can work positively and constructively in Government. In my opinion, we need candidates with varied skills and abilities in order to tackle these demanding issues. As a Manx person I want to safeguard and promote our unique language, culture and identity for future generations.

Geraldine O'Neill

Constituency Issues

On a constituency level, if elected I will give a commitment to holding regular constituency surgeries to advise, help and resolve issues of importance for constituents such as vandalism, parking, speed limits and the bus service. I will liaise and network with local government bodies, the Douglas Borough Council, Neighbourhood Police, Age Concern, the Chamber of Commerce and Youth Services. In my view, this is essential to provide an overview for all sections of the community living and working in Douglas East. The problem of Derelict housing is one of my main priorities, to combat this growing issue we need tougher penalties for owners and landlords rent restrictions, less bureaucracy and social legislation to back this up.

The completion of the Douglas and Promenade Regeneration Project is essential to make Douglas a more attractive place to live and work. We cannot expect to attract either tourists or new businesses to the Island if our capital does not reflect the infrastructure and prosperity of a successful town. We must have proper maintenance of the IRIS sewage system as there are currently environmental health concerns regarding its operation. Plans for the development of the quayside/ bus site, need to be reconsidered, to offer realistic options. In the current economic climate more empty retail units will do nothing for the capital. Providing more amenities for visitors, local residents and young people would be a far more useful strategy. Utilising Government sites such as the Summerland property as a car park could bring in revenue by setting up a Park and Ride scheme. Until a long-term solution to this vacant property can be negotiated at least it could relieve the traffic congestion at peak times in the day and have a beneficial impact on quality of life on the Promenade. It would also free up parking spaces all around Douglas. The Castle Mona situation also needs urgent Government action, it is a disgrace to see the continued decline of this iconic building.

The Economy

In order to balance the budget we need to reduce Government expenditure by analysing the priorities for spending in each department. We need an overview carried out by the Civil Service and the relevant ministers to cut down our administration sector, in order to continue to deliver frontline services in Health, Education and Social Services. We will need to examine the staffing structure to achieve economies through more efficient running of departments. This may lead to retraining and re-skilling of Public Sector staff, however with cooperation from the Chamber of Commerce, Private Enterprise and the Trade Unions it should be possible to offset/limit job losses.

Government must reduce its scope by outsourcing more services in order to reduce the burden on the taxpayer. In these current economic difficulties we need to carefully examine the cost and sustainability of funding continuous loss making services. I believe the new Government needs to examine their options as to how we could more efficiently and profitably run/manage Government assets such as the Villa and the Gaiety Complex. The Airport should also be able to operate on a profit-making basis with the right marketing advice. Professional and marketing experts should be consulted, possible franchise agreements could be negotiated by Government. We have successful entrepreneurs living on the Island who could offer valuable business advice as to how we can profitably utilise Governments assets. However, the control of these assets would need to be carefully protected to ensure we maintain maximum benefit and continued ownership for the Isle of Man taxpayer. To offset our long-term reliance on the VAT sharing agreement with the UK, we need to investigate how other small jurisdictions such as Jersey and Guernsey successfully operate their economies.

Education

It is imperative that there is continued and sustained investment in Education. This needs to be an integral part of future Government strategies in order to combat unemployment. We must strive to provide all of our young people with the necessary qualifications to compete in an ever increasingly difficult job market. Therefore, continued Government grants and finance for University Education is fundamental for the future competitiveness of our society. Low educational achievement is strongly connected with poverty and disadvantage. International research shows that around 85% of a student's attainment is due their family's background. It is important to assess levels of child poverty in the Isle of Man and develop and support mechanisms to end child poverty.

To avoid a growing NEETs (not in education, employment or training) problem we need to support and cooperate with the Third Sector, Government Agencies and Private Enterprise. To engage these young people in training and education schemes we must continue to finance Youth Services to allow them to operate effectively. Vulnerable young people need the positive participation of Government agencies such as counselling and accommodation services to give them the productive basis to be involved in education or training programmes. With the participation and cooperation of Private Enterprise we can involve these young people (who are often on the fringes of society) in Work Experience Schemes which could lead to employment. Through continued constructive engagement we can tackle this growing problem. As Youth Services receive a very small percentage of Department of Education and Children's budget, we may need to reassess this spending curtailment.

Recruitment and retention of key teaching staff is essential to maintain the best possible educational standards for the future.

Health, Dental and Social Services

The Government's Health Policy needs to be proactive with well-funded preventative health strategies. For a community of our size with the levels of healthcare professionals employed in this sector, we should not have the current waiting lists for many minor medical procedures. Through effective examination of working practices we should be able to reduce the 'administration trail' and offer a more efficient and customer friendly service to all patients. Due to our increasingly older population more money needs to be spent on research to tackle the growing levels of Dementia. If we do not address this problem we will have increased expenditure on medication and nursing homes etc. We need to cater better with mental health issues in general to avoid discrimination and inequality. Our dental care provision requires the same examination as our General Health Policy. The difficulties encountered by patients seeking dental treatment and finding availability in a dental practice should be more efficiently addressed, the Isle of Man has an unacceptable level of poor dental hygiene. A more effective central dental strategy needs to be adopted to deal with this.

We must continue to deliver the best quality social services possible to help the vulnerable sections of our society. The unemployed, pensioners, the disabled, single parents, the homeless etc. Although the Isle of Man is still a wealthy economy despite the current world economic situation, we have the dual responsibility not only to ensure increased economic prosperity but to develop our long-term Social Legislation Policy. Although we already have Means Testing for most of our 'universal' benefits and social housing, we may have to examine in the future possible threshold levels for child benefit allowances. However, we must be careful to protect susceptible sections of society by not inflicting 'cuts' which could create an underclass. Future Government social policy must continually safeguard the lower echelons of society.

Housing and Energy

Affordable housing should be a priority for our next Government. We need to extend and develop the first time buyer scheme and investigate other financial schemes to tackle this growing problem. Government mortgages with shared equity provision could be financially viable, the Government could offer a cheaper mortgage rate than the banking sector. We also need to consider provision for second time house buyers. Financing the required deposit to obtain a mortgage is often the most difficult hurdle for house purchasers. Introducing Credit Unions to the Isle of Man could help alleviate this burden as Credit Unions are a cooperative community banking service. Each member of the Credit Union has shares and equity therefore it encourages long term saving which would encourage a saving ethos in our society. Our allocation process of Social Housing also needs to be re-examined carefully, so we deliver a fair and equitable service to all. Making affordable housing available to a greater proportion of our population would decrease the reliance on rented properties and have a positive knock on effect on our economy in general.

Our energy policy for the future must focus on achieving best value for money for the consumer. The government needs to devise a long-term strategic plan to reduce and contain our energy budget. We have already invested substantially in our electricity power station and natural gas projects. The government's goal of 15% of renewable electricity produced on the Island by 2015 is commendable if it is economically feasible. By combining the possibility of wind power both on and offshore as a back up to electricity and gas energy providers, this may present opportunities for cost effective renewable schemes in the future. As the Isle of Man owns its offshore sea beds the prospects of leasing/ allowing developers to research at their cost, could offer a substantial boost to the economy. Wave and tidal energy solutions require more long-term analysis and research.

Industrial Relations Policy and Social Legislation

In view of the current world economic crisis, the lack of Trade Union legislation leaves workers without statutory protection. The IOM TUC recognises the value of the voluntary resolution of issues between employers and employees and the emphasis put on the encouragement of each party to be prepared to consult and negotiate in good faith about trade union recognition. This is an ideal situation however we know that life is not 'ideal' and there are employers who would rather take advantage of their employees and not take note of concerns or issues or even provide a forum for these to be aired with impunity. Self-regulation has been shown to be lacking in so many areas and may have had a part to play in the financial difficulties that the world and banking industry has experienced recently.

As we move into a period of increased uncertainty and difficulties for employees who may individually feel unable to voice concerns or seek resolution to issues. I support the IOM Trades Council's call that the code to be placed on a statutory footing so that a trade union or trade unions may be recognised by an employer and that certain rights can be conferred to carry out trade union duties and/or activities.

Social Legislation, I support:

- The Freedom of Information Act
- The introduction of the Regulation of Care Bill
- Disability Discrimination Legislation
- A Homeless Act
- Sara's Law
- Legislation to standardise employees contractual working agreements
- TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment)

Reform of Tynwald / Pensions / Planning

As a democratic nation we must constantly strive to represent and govern the nation in the best interests of all of its citizens. In view of the current economic crisis we need to review our Government structures. The allocation of MHKs to constituencies needs to be examined to offer a fairer representation of the population etc. The members of the Legislative Council must be publicly elected to ensure all fundamental legislation is decided by members of both houses with a public mandate. For the next Government 'quality not quantity' of legislation is paramount, we do not need wasted time or resources on ineffectual bills that are not directly related to life on the Isle of Man.

I agree that the Public Sector Pension Scheme is a major drain on our Island reserves. It is unsustainable in its current form, therefore proposals to close it to new entrants should be carefully considered and analysed. The relevant Trade Unions should be involved in all aspects of any alternative solutions to this problem. Tynwald members should most definitely contribute to their pension scheme. These negotiations should be undertaken by the new Government as soon as it takes up office, in order to demonstrate publicly and transparently to the Manx Electorate that we must all bear our fair share of the financial burden in the future.

I support a coordinated and more strategic approach to planning. The current planning policy needs to be simplified and less bureaucratic with clear and distinct guidelines. The recent Government review of planning procedures are sensible and pragmatic, we need this legislation to be enacted as soon as possible. This is an area where Government and the Private Sector can work together. For example, where there are no planning issues or objections there should be a straight forward process which would save time and money for both Government and the Private Sector/individual.



Tourism and New Markets

We need to protect the diversity of our economy by exploring possible 'niche markets' and building on the Island's natural resources. Our work force needs to be trained to adapt to the needs of Employers. This can be achieved through greater Employer input into Vocational and business programmes. We need more working partnerships between Government Educational Organisations such as the Isle of Man College and Private Enterprise to ensure our work force meets the market needs. Through constructive consultation with Public and Private Sector Unions and Employers, I believe we can successfully adapt and retrain our workforce in order to retain flexibility in the market place.

We must offset the economic challenges facing us, by creating wealth and seeking to market the Island successfully i.e. expand the niche markets such as High Tech Industries, Tourism and try to develop Research and Development projects which the Isle of Man could benefit from financially. I am in favour of initiatives designed to support sectors within the economy for example The Marketing Initiative Scheme which has been very successful. I also support the new initiative between the Department of Economic Development and the Chamber of Commerce to encourage greater cooperation between Government and the Private Sector.

I am personally interested in Government initiatives which will support cultural tourism. As a founding member and Director of the Archibald Knox Society which aims to promote the legacy of Archibald Knox nationally and internationally. In my opinion, through Cultural Tourism we can promote and attract both businesses and tourists to the Isle of Man for short stay cultural visits. Cultural Tourism is a growing International market, however, we need greater Government focus and cooperation on how to capitalise on this form of tourism.

Relationships with the UK / EU and Independence

Due to the recent VAT redistribution of the Common Purse Agreement with the UK and the Reciprocal Health Agreement. Our overall relationship with the UK has deteriorated both on a political and economic level. In order to avoid further cuts in our revenue from this agreement, we must develop a long-term strategy to decrease our dependence on this income. The investigation of other potential agreements with other nations needs to be part of our future planning. Exploring bilateral agreements with other nations both within the EU and other fast growing economies worldwide could help sustain our financial future. Stronger alliances with other members of the British/ Irish Council could be potentially beneficial on both an economic and political level.

Despite the world financial crisis the Isle of Man is still in a strong economic position coping better than many major economies such as America, the EU and Britain. The position and influence of our small Island has a considerable stabilising effect on economies surrounding us. Therefore, although a small nation, we must continue to forge links with other nations in order to network for economic development. By allying ourselves with other nations we can increase our voice in international arenas. Through our international representation by our politicians we need to show we have the skills and experience to enhance our standing in the international community. Long-term independence may be an achievable reality, however, we must be capable of both economic and political independence and have the support of the Manx people through a Referendum.

WHERE TO VOTE

If you are not sure which Ward you live in
please contact Geraldine at 665459 mobile 430209

Email: goneill@manx.net Website: www.geraldineoneilliom.webs.com

Tynwald Polling Station

at First Douglas Scout Hall, Demesne Road.

Crescent Polling Station

at Promenade Methodist, Church Loch Prom.

Strand Polling Station

at Douglas Town Hall, Ridgeway Street

Windsor Polling Station

at Promenade Methodist Church, Loch Prom.

Derby Polling Station

at Rosemount Church Hall, Rosemount

Vote **GERALDINE**
O'NEILL 